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## A Wisconsin Boy in Dixie: Civil War Letters of James K. Newton

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## Book Notices

*A Wisconsin Boy in Dixie: Civil War Letters of James K. Newton*, edited by Stephen Ambrose. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995. xviii, 188 pp. Maps, notes, index. \$11.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY LEEANN WHITES, UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA

On October 1, 1861, James K. Newton enlisted in Company F of the Fourteenth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry. He would serve the entire length of the war, participating in the battles at Shiloh and Vicksburg, among others. He came to know the trials and tribulations of camp life, the scourge of disease, and the deep melancholy of homesickness. Newton, a rural farm boy, was only eighteen years old when he enlisted in the war. His youth and rural background were similar to many other common soldiers, but in at least one way he was unusual: he was a schoolteacher in a one-room schoolhouse before he enlisted. The war brought out his talents as a writer, talents that are revealed in the numerous letters he wrote home to his family describing his experiences in the course of the war.

In 1961 the University of Wisconsin Press published an edited version of these letters. The same press has now republished the collection, with the original introduction by the editor, Stephen Ambrose. Contemporary readers of this text will not only see the war from the vantage point of a youthful northern soldier, one with a keen eye for the strengths and foibles of his officers and fellow soldiers; they will also be forcibly reminded that Civil War soldiers carried family members and loved ones with them despite their physical separation. In his letters home, Newton frequently worries about how his parents are getting by without him. He sends them most of his pay, when he receives any at all, and reassures them about the state of his health and morals. He also tries to share the sights and sounds, not only of the war, but of a new and different land, the South. Readers will find Newton's thinking about southern race relations, the race-based meaning of the war, and his own brush with the possibility of being an officer in an African-American regiment to be particularly revealing of his time and of his place in it.

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